

THE CARIBBEAN LEGION -- LUPERON LANDING

The group of Central American military adventurers and political dissidents which took the name "Caribbean Legion" in 1942 was organized by remnants of the so-called Ejercito de Liberacion de America (ELA) which conducted the ill-fated Cayo Confites expedition against the Dominican Republic in 1947.

After that defeat, the cadres were reformed in Guatemala as the Ejercito de Liberacion de Costa Rica and in March-April 1948 became the deciding factor in the revolutionary action which overthrew the Picado government of that country and led to establishment of a provisional government under Jose Figueres.

After the close of the Costa Rican fighting the irregulars adopted the name "Caribbean Legion." They were at the peak of their power, prestige and influence and their leaders were on intimate terms with Figueres and Presidents Arevalo of Guatemala and Frio Socarras of Cuba. With Figueres' blessing headquarters and training bases were established in Costa Rica. Their general aim was to eliminate the Central American and Caribbean dictatorships and establish democratic regimes in their places. The wing of the Legion which eventually made headquarters in Guatemala was largely dominated by leaders who sought the establishment of a socialist Central American Union.

The purposes and motivations of the leaders and individual members of the Caribbean Legion were and have always been a combination of revolutionary idealism, political opportunism and mercenary militarism. Communism was not a characteristic feature of the Legion at any time; those who revealed Communist tendencies or affiliations were a minority, and from 1948 onwards a positive anti-Communist current led to divisions and contributed to the eventual disorganization and dispersal of the organization.

The two principal leaders of the Guatemalan section of the Legion, "General" Miguel Angel Ramirez, former chief of staff of the Caribbean Legion, and his aide Jorge Ribas Montes, are still living in Guatemala but are not known to be engaged in active revolutionary enterprises. However, the Nicaraguan revolutionary Professor Edelberto Torres, now openly pro-Communist, who headed the leftist faction of the Legion,

has been prominent for some years as a leader and organizer of pro-Communist activities in Guatemalan educational circles. The Honduran revolutionary and notorious pro-Communist, Colonel Francisco Morazan, formerly active in the Legion, remains in a key position in the Guatemalan Government as private secretary to President Arbenz.

As recorded in the Resolution adopted by the Provisional Organ of Consultation of the Investigating Committee of the OAS February 21, 1949, "The Government of Costa Rica took the steps that were indispensable in order to avert the existence on its territory of any organization whose object might be conspiracy against the security of the Nicaraguan Government or those of other American States.

"Some of the persons who had been dispersed in Costa Rica continued their activities in other countries of the Caribbean zone. Availing themselves of the regular facilities for free transit between Cuba and Guatemala, and making occasional trips to Mexico and the United States, they continued their efforts to organize expeditions and fighting forces destined very shortly to show themselves disposed for a new attempt at invasion of the Dominican Republic.

"Part of the armament relied upon by the Cayo Confites conspirators and not seized in its entirety by the Cuban Government, was evidently increased by subsequent purchases and through facilities provided by Guatemalan authorities, and was concentrated in Guatemala, where it was loaded on the various planes destined to take part in the invasion of June 18."

From the Guatemalan base, the Caribbean Legion prepared a new attack on the Dominican Republic in June, 1949. Early Sunday evening, 19 June, two amphibian aircrafts, a Catalina and a Gruman H-1, 096-N, attempted to land invasion supplies on the coast of Luperon township, Province of Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. One of the two planes succeeded in landing, but a mixed group of soldiers and townspeople killed all but one member of the invading party. The weapons and supplies which they were attempting to land included miscellaneous rifles, machine guns and ammunition, grenades, TNT, and medicines.

The Guatemalan government subsequently denied that it had any connection with this invasion. The Investigating Committee of the OAS stated, however:

"There is proof that the Catalina aircraft, which made a water landing at Luperon, took off at the Lago de Izabal in the Republic of Guatemala. The testimony presented to the Committee indicates that the delivery of the armament and the preparation of the aforementioned amphibious plane were facilitated by military authorities at the air base of San Jose de Guatemala.

"The testimony referred to in the immediately preceding paragraph, and other sources of information, including the documents of the Inter-American Peace Committee, afford evidence that the planes of Mexican commercial registry, XA-NOS (C-47) and XB-HUB (C-46), which later (on June 18) landed on Mexican territory, were likewise outfitted and made ready at the San Jose Military Air Base in Guatemala, under the supervision of the Chief of the Guatemalan Air Forces.

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"It is clear that Guatemalan authorities facilitated and permitted continuous and illegal activities as regards traffic in arms and passage of planes. It is likewise a fact that the revolutionary leaders, Eufemio Fernandez (Cuban), Juan Rodriguez and Miguel Angel Ramirez (Dominicans), Miguel Francisco Morazan (Honduran), and many others identified with the illicit activities, enjoyed privileges and facilities that were helpful in the preparations for the Luperon attack. The aforementioned Eufemio Fernandez, who played an active part at Cayo Confites and who (according to his own statements) was not connected at the time with any official post, appears as an outstanding leader of the invasion of June 1949. In May 1949, a month prior to the Luperon incident (so his testimony runs), he resigned from his post as Chief of the Cuban Secret Police, although the information furnished by the Cuban authorities indicates that the said resignation was submitted on April 1, 1948. The Committee has no additional information regarding the acceptance of the resignation or the appointment of a titular substitute.

"The Guatemalan Army planes, T-1 and T-2, which were linked with the attempted invasion, and also the two planes (C-46 and C-47) of Mexican commercial registry, which were

carrying armament and expeditionary forces, made a landing on Mexican territory. The two planes last named, together with the persons traveling in them, were officially detained by the Mexican Government, and the armament carried by them was seized.

"The Government of Mexico has supplied the Committee with a list of the persons detained and with a copy of the inventory of the armament, the latter now being in the custody of Mexican military authorities."

Several Spanish Republican exiles, some of them known Communists, were among the members of the expedition who were detained in Mexico. The Guatemalan Foreign Minister, the late Enrique Munos Menny, made special efforts to obtain their release.

The OAS Investigating Committee further reported that during its stay in the Dominican Republic, the Committee "had an opportunity to inspect the armament confiscated at Luperon by the Dominican authorities. This armament includes fifteen 45-calibre Reising sub-machine guns (Model 50), whose serial numbers correspond exactly to those of precisely the same quantity of weapons acquired in the United States by an agent of the Guatemalan Government and exported in January 1949 with the Guatemalan Ministry of Defense as their destination. The numbers of these sub-machine guns (which have been duly checked) are as follows: 110877, 110917; 111331; 112401; 113086; 110767; 110527; 111224; 113195; 113389, 113663; 112278; 111944, 110408' 109029.

"The remainder of the armament, made up of heterogeneous elements, could have come from what was left of the armament formerly at the disposal of the Cayo Confites conspirators, or from material acquired later.

"Immediately after the events at Luperon, part of the armament destined for the aforementioned invasion remained in Guatemala, for undetermined reasons. This armament, which was transported first from the San Jose air base to a public building in Guatemala City, was later deposited in a residence on the shore of Lake Amatitlan.

"When the military uprising of July 1949 broke out in Guatemala, shortly after the assassination of Colonel Arana, Mr. Eufemio Fernandez made a non-stop flight from Habana on a plane that carried certain war materials designed to assist in suppressing the uprising. Several Guatemalan officials were exiled as a result of the insurrection, and were taken from Guatemala to Habana in a Compania Aviataca plane, under the custody of Messrs. Eufemio Fernandez and Miguel Francisco Morazan, both of whom were veterans of the revolutionary operations in the Caribbean area.

"At the Rancho Boyeros airport, the abovementioned officials were handed over to Mr. Erundino Vilela Pena, Acting Chief of the Secret Police of Cuba, and conducted to the Hotel San Luis, the Cuban headquarters of the Dominican exiles, owned by Mr. Cruz Alonso, where they remained for some time under guard."

There was open evidence in Guatemala which strongly supported the conclusions of the OAS Committee regarding Guatemalan official and semi-official aid to the Caribbean Legion. Guatemalan armed forces equipment and services, including use of the Guatemalan Air Force, apparently were made available to the Legion. Members of the Legion were maintained on certain Government Intervened Farms (Fincas Nacionales). The Ministry of Communications and Public Works apparently paid the cost of maintaining the two vessels Prado de Alvarado and Tecun Uman which were put under Guatemalan registry and used by the Legion. According to the findings of the OAS Committee, "In the course of its denunciations the Dominican Republic has referred repeatedly to the vessels Patricia and Alicia, which were anchored in Cuban waters during the Luperon incident. The Compania Maritima Indoamericana (established on June 11, 1949), whose President and one of whose three stockholders is Mr. Cruz Alonso, sold these vessels on September 26 of the same year to Lic. Ricardo Castaneda Paganini, Minister Plenipotentiary of Guatemala in Cuba, who was acting in the name of the Executive of his country and as a representative of the Guatemalan Government. It should be noted that it was Mr. Cruz Alonso for whom a landing barge, the Patria, was destined, when its export license was revoked by the United States Government in August 1947, upon discovery of the fact that the said barge was destined for the Cayo Confites revolutionaries.

"The vessels Patricia and Alicia sailed from Habana to Puerto Barrios, where one of them anchored on November 27, 1949, and the other on November 30, under the new names of Pedro de Alvarado for the boat that arrived first and Tecun Uman for the one that arrived on November 30.

"Declarations made by the respective Captains state that at the time when these vessels were visited by the Committee, their crews were entirely of Cuban nationality, which is also the nationality of the aforesaid Captains. The vessels are under the charge of the Guatemalan Ministry of Communications which takes care of maintenance expenses and pays the wages of the crews."

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THE CARIBBEAN LEGION

The tangled story of the Caribbean Legion involves individuals and governments in all of the Central American and Caribbean Republics. Guatemala, for example, was no more a prime mover in the revolutionary events of 1949 than was Cuba. Jose Figueres, now President of Costa Rica, first achieved office with the help of the Legion. Two points of significance at the present time, however, appear to set the case of Guatemala apart from those of the other countries concerned.

The first lies in the fact that the pro-Communist leadership which appeared as a minority element in the Legion during 1947-49 is the only leadership which has retained influence in Guatemala. These former non-Communist officers of the Legion who still reside in Guatemala seem to be living on slender means and to be inactive politically. The former pro-Communist leaders of the Legion, on the other hand, such as Morazan and Torres, are recipients of favor and privileges from the Guatemalan government.

Morazan, as is well known, was one of the assassins of Colonel Francisco Javier Arana, Chief of the Armed Forces. Colonel Arana was an opponent of Communism and just prior to his assassination was reported as about to open an investigation of the charges that Guatemalan defense funds and facilities had been given to the Caribbean Legion. Units of the Legion were used by the Guatemalan Government, along with regular military forces, to suppress the incipient revolt which flared up as a reaction to the ambush and assassination of Arana. The plot against Arana's life was widely known, and the Dominican radio issued warnings to Arana regarding it. President Arevalo appears to have been cognizant of the plan to check Arana's activities. It is not certain that Colonel Arbenz, then Minister of Defense, was a party to the plot, but the incident put a cloud over his candidacy and election as President, and whether of his own will or not, Arbenz has had Colonel Morazan at his side, an intimate partner to all his acts as President, from that time onward. The other principal author of the assassination, Enrique Martinez Estevez, has been equally close.

The second point of significance in the present situation of Guatemala vis-a-vis the Caribbean Legion, as compared with other countries,

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lies in the fact that Guatemala appears to be the only one whose government continues any form of direct support to these irregulars, although it is clear that whatever organization still exists is tenuous and internationally unimportant. For the sake of comparison, however, it may be noted that President Jose Figueres of Costa Rica and his friend Romulo Betancourt, the ex-President of Venezuela, appear to have broken with the military revolutionarists. While still advocating the replacement of Caribbean dictatorships by more democratic governments, they appear to have broken with the military and to be striving for their objectives through political means. The current revolutionary efforts of ex-President Frio Socarras of Cuba against the Bastista government embrace some former elements of the Caribbean Legion but remain predominantly an affair of Cuban politics without involvement of other governments.

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